GIAMBATTISTA BODONI

OF PARMA

MONUMENT TO BODONI, ERECTED AT SALUZZO, OCT. 20, 1872

GIAMBATTISTA BODONI
OF PARMA

T. M. CLELAND

SP

BOSTON
THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS
M C M X V I

GIAMBATTISTA
BODONI
OF PARMA

Mr. President and Members of The Society
of Printers :

In selecting, as the subject of your meeting
tonight, Bodoni, the printer of Parma, on
this centennial anniversary of his death, you
have done a very wise and just thing. For
though he may have been over-praised and
honoured in his own day, he has certainly
received rather more than a fair share of
neglect in ours. While I am very sensible
of the honour, I am not so sure of the wis-
dom of your having asked *me* to talk to you
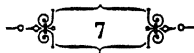
on this subject, and as you have made this bed, you may be compelled to fall asleep in it before the evening is over; but we have, fortunately, what appears to be a very representative collection of specimens of Bodoni's work here tonight for inspection and study. These shall be the real speakers of the evening, and from them I hope you will gather much interest and even inspiration. My part shall be no more than to introduce them to you — a sufficiently difficult one within such a limited time. To do this we must know something of the history of the printer himself; we must analyze, as far as we are able, the elements of his style, consider the sources from which it grew, and note wherein it is distinctive or original.

The principal source of biographical data which we have relative to Bodoni is the "Life" written by his friend, Joseph De Lama, and published at Parma in 1816 — a work rich in the banalities and bombast common to the biographies of that epoch, and which does not, I regret to say, present quite the vivid impression of its hero which

we should like to have. Another book, compiled at an earlier date and entitled "Anecdotes to Serve for a Life of G. B. Bodoni," is certainly more interesting because of its more personal note; but since it is not so much the history as the work of Bodoni as a printer which is important to us as printers, I shall offer you only the briefest and barest outline of his early life, with a view to arriving the sooner at a more careful consideration of his types and the books and other things he printed from them at the Royal Press of Parma.

Giambattista Bodoni was born at Saluzzo, in the Province of Piedmont, on the 16th of February, 1740. His father was a printer before him, and we are told by his biographer that he applied himself diligently in his early youth to the learning of that trade, and that when he was but twelve years of age he showed a decided artistic instinct by devising some nocturnal illuminations on the front of his father's house, during a local festival, which excited the wonder and admiration of the inhabitants of Saluzzo.

It is of more interest to us, however, to

know that when still quite a boy he cut a
number of wood blocks with such success
that the prints from them obtained some sale
in Turin. The approbation which these early
attempts received appears to have aroused in
young Bodoni a lively ambition to go to Rome
and there perfect himself in this art. He had
a great curiosity, we are told, to see the famous
press of the Propaganda Fides, the missionary
institution of the Roman Church which issues
ecclesiastical works in all languages for dis-
tribution all over the world.

He was eighteen years of age when he set
out on this journey, with one of his fellow
townsmen for companion, and when he finally
succeeded in visiting the press of the Propa-
ganda his enthusiasm and interest so impressed
the head of that institution that he immedi-
ately engaged Bodoni as a compositor. During
his stay here he took up the study of Oriental
languages with such success that he was able
to redistribute and put into useful order the
series of exotic characters which had been
cut in Sixtus Fifth's time by the French type-
cutters Garamond and Le Bé, and which had

become hopelessly pied, and had been for a long time useless. He had to clean the rust from the punches and matrices and put them in good order for casting, and it is painful for the less scholarly among us to dwell upon a task like this, and difficult to conceive of the interest and enthusiasm which alone could have supported him in it. And yet this interest in these strange outlandish characters never seems to have deserted him from that time on, as we shall see later, by examining his "Manuale," or specimen book of types. It is apparently through his labours with these matrices and punches that he was inspired to undertake the cutting of type punches on his own account.

His first attempts at this were decided failures, but he kept at it until he succeeded in getting a fairly good ornament, and finally a series of capital letters, which were admired by his associates at Rome.

He made an important friend at this time — the Father Maria Paciaudi, then Librarian to Cardinal Spinelli, the head of the Propaganda; and it was this same priest who after-

ward became Librarian to the Duke Ferdinand
I of Parma on his succession to that state in
1765. The Duke of Parma, inspired by the
counsels of his minister, Du Tillot, established
an Academy of Fine Arts, founded the remark-
able library which still exists in that city, and
was ambitious to have a royal press like those
at Paris, Madrid, Turin, and other capitols, and
it was Father Paciaudi who suggested Bodoni
as the director of such an establishment.

Bodoni, in the meantime, had decided on
a trip to England, where he had been told
greater opportunities would be open to him
than at Rome. He had stopped to visit his
parents at Saluzzo, when he was taken with
a fever which kept him there for some time.
It was this fortunate, if not agreeable, cir-
cumstance which put an end to the projected
visit to England and kept him in Italy at the
moment when the Parma Government was
seeking a director for its press. The offer
reached him at Saluzzo, and on the 24th of
February, 1768, we find him arrived at Parma
and preparing to build presses and collect the
various materials which were to form the

equipment of the new establishment. A press had already existed in the Ducal Palace of Parma, and a document has been found which was printed in the seventeenth century, entitled "A Note on the Printing Types in the Press of the Duke of Parma," etc. But this must have been a poor affair and fallen into disuse, for I can find no mention of Bodoni's having made use of anything he found there.

Bodoni was now twenty-eight years of age, and it is at this point that his career as a printer begins; and the story of his life is in reality the story of his work. Thus, before pursuing any further his biography, it would be well to consider the nature of this work and some of the influences and conditions out of which it developed.

Like most successful men he arrived upon the scene at a very happy moment, when the art of printing was in as low a state of decline as it had ever been. The lamp of the great Renaissance was spluttering dismally, and the splendid mastery which we are familiar with in the works of the great printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries began to fade

in the seventeenth, and by the eighteenth century had almost ceased to exist. It is quite true that much of the best work of the eighteenth century continued to show some taste and style in composition; but this was little more than a protraction of the good traditions which died hard in those days. At any rate, interest in the beauty and workmanship of typography and presswork for its own sake was very dead. Books were thought to be beautiful because of their engraved illustrations and ornament, and typography was regarded as a mere utilitarian adjunct, and in some cases was abandoned altogether, as in the editions of Horace, made by John Pine in London in 1737, in which all the text was engraved on copper with the plates, and which was considered the apotheosis of fine bookmaking at that time. But if typography and types became poor and clumsy, presswork had grown slovenly beyond belief, and we find some of those books in which the exquisitely designed and engraved plates of the most celebrated of the French draughtsmen and engravers were lavished with the

loosest prodigality so badly printed in the text as to be almost illegible.

To John Baskerville, of Birmingham, credit is no doubt due for the first attempt to revive the art of typography itself, and for the first publications in the eighteenth century which threw their entire dependence for recognition upon their typography alone, without any extraneous adornment. But Baskerville was not altogether successful, and he certainly did not get very much encouragement. His types were fine in certain respects, but they were not. a sufficiently radical improvement over those which had already existed to make a very great stir. A number of others followed, like the brothers Foulis in Glasgow, the Didots in Paris, and the Spaniard Ibarra. But it remained for the robust Italian, with his limitless energy and exalted ideals, to grasp anew the idea of the organic beauty of printing, and to infuse into it the definite style and expression of his epoch.

Whatever may be our judgment now of that style and the taste which produced it, it is apparent that it contained a more vital germ than did any of the tentatives of his contem-

poraries, since the best of them came to follow it, and its influence is still discernible in the common current of our printed matter today. I say that his style in typography was a perfect expression of his own epoch, like any art of consequence; but like all artists of any consequence, he was inspired by the beautiful traditions of the past, and his art was an orderly development out of these. He did not seek consciously to express his own individuality; happily, it was ample to express itself. But it is certain that he introduced into the forms of printing types a decidedly new and characteristic style, which our eyes are so familiar with at the present time, in all of those types which we know as "modern face," that it is at first a little difficult to see that it was so. And now, for the reason that his style, or whatever you prefer to call it, was so closely related to the thought and feeling of his time and sprang out of it, it seems to me indispensable that we consider, at least briefly, what was the artistic constitution of this period at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The art of the middle of the eighteenth century, which but a few years ago was always referred to as wholly frivolous (though I can't think of any more serious task than to do it as beautifully as most of it was done), had certainly indulged in excesses of brilliance which left something in the state of the public mind akin to the purely private feeling of having eaten too much cake, with a consequent revival of interest in humbler and simpler nourishment. What followed in the history of art was certainly dry and unpalatable in some of its chief characteristics.

The discovery of the buried cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii had helped to fire throughout Europe an immense enthusiasm for classical antiquity and art. But with all the inspiration that was liberated by the opening of these sepulchres there was mingled something like a wave of cold, dead air, which had the effect of nearly asphyxiating artistic progress altogether. There was Winckelmann, who wrote volumes on classical sculpture and tried to establish a system upon which the Greeks had arrived at perfection of form; and

there was Raphael Mengs, the painter and writer on art, who had worked out a theory to combine the form of Greek sculpture, the expression of Raphael, the colour of Titian, and the light and shade of Correggio. Mengs was a pretty poor painter himself, despite the fact that Bodoni, in a letter, calls him the "Apelles of Our Time," and says that Tiepolo (one of the best painters that ever lived) wasn't fit to serve him at table.

All this produced a return to classical forms, if not to classical feeling. Everyone affected to talk in high-flown terms of purity of form, divine harmony, etc., and quoted on all occasions from the Greek and Latin authors.

Bodoni never writes to a friend in Rome and calls it Rome. He always says, "I hope soon to join you on the banks of the Tiber," and he always calls Madrid "the banks of the Tagus." Many of his books bear the imprint "Crisopoli" instead of Parma, which is somewhat confusing until one learns that this was the legendary name given to Parma during the brief domination of the Greeks in the sixth century. This was the taste of the time

which produced the sculptures of Canova, and
the paintings of the school of David, which
have been aptly styled "tinted bas-reliefs,"
and also the types of Bodoni. It was a period
of rather pompous affectations, which amuse
us a little today and give scope to that facile
faculty of negative criticism which is one of
the best developed and least effective accom-
plishments of which our time can boast.

If this pseudo-classical school of art has a
faded and artificial air in our sophisticated
eyes, it is not safe to assume, on the other
hand, that any of those men who attained
eminence in it were not sincere, and least of
all that our friend Bodoni was not. One can-
not read the record of his activities and see
listed the great volume of his productions in
the "Life" written by De Lama, one cannot
contemplate the almost superhuman labour
of cutting all those types in the "Manuale,"
or read what he has to say in the preface of
that book, or in his letters, on the subject
of his work, and fail to realize that he was
a man profoundly and passionately devoted
to his art.

We have considered, in a very rough fashion, what was the intellectual basis of his peculiar type designs and style of composition; but we must remember that he did not start out with this characteristic style full blown; and though it was, as I have said, the expression of his epoch and grew out of it, Bodoni, of course, was no more conscious of the special flavour of that epoch than we are of ours. We must look to the practical basis of his work as it appeared to him in order to arrive at any understanding of it.

When he established himself in the Parma Press he had to have an outfit of types; for up to that time his own efforts at type cutting were hardly successful enough for so important an undertaking. After due consideration of the types of the principal founders of the time, he judged those of the French founder, Fournier, to be the best, and accordingly he ordered six different sizes of Fournier's types from Paris. With these he printed the first six items issued from the Ducal Press under his direction. But he was not content to

rest upon the sufficiently honourable title of printer to the Duke of Parma, and his genius asserts itself here in his desire for perfection. He must improve on Fournier's types, much as he evidently admired them; and very soon after his settlement at Parma he established a foundry of his own and took his brother Joseph in to manage it. He set to work cutting his punches, and in 1771 he brought out his first specimen book of borders and capitals, which was distributed gratis, as a sort of advertisement for the press. There are only a few types in this, but an extravagant profusion of ornaments. It is interesting to see in this first specimen how completely he was under the French influence; for in this book he copies outright the elaborately framed title-pages of Fournier's "Manuel," constructed entirely from moveable type ornaments and borders. It is difficult to discover the very minute differences which exist between these first types of Bodoni and those by which they were inspired. For a considerable time after this he continues to show a fondness for the baroque character of the

French work, and uses ornaments in great number and with great ingenuity, if not always with the best taste.

There is little in this early work which is above the average of the time, and certainly nothing to foretell the severity and elegance of his full-fledged style. He went on refining and improving on Fournier's designs, which were good sound models in their way, working step by step in his own peculiar direction toward what amounted finally to a complete innovation in the forms of Roman characters, and brought about a radical change in the style and arrangement of printed matter generally.

Now by way of explanation of just what that innovation was and what were the peculiarities of his design, we cannot do better than quote from the preface of his "Manuale" where he states some of his theories on the subject. He says: "It is proper here to offer the four different heads under which it seems to me are derived the beauties of type, and the first of these is regularity—conformity without ambiguity, variety without disso-

nance, and equality and symmetry without confusion. A second and not minor value is to be gained from sharpness of definition, neatness, and finish. From the perfection of the punches in the beginning comes the polish of the well-cast letter which should shine like a mirror on its face." His next point is that of taste, and here he speaks of "The beautiful contrast as between light and shade which comes naturally from any writing done with a well-cut pen held properly in the hand." It must be admitted that most of this statement is fuller of redundancy than of meaning; but this latter sentence about "light and shade" and the natural effect of writing with a pen is illuminating in the highest degree and explains more clearly than anything else he has to say the aim and tendency of his type design. In order to achieve this "light and shade" he made his thin strokes thinner and the thick ones thicker than they had ever been made in Roman types before, and he cut them with a sharpness and regularity which had never up to that time been equalled. He speaks of the natural effect of their being

written with a well-cut pen, and I presume you are all more or less familiar with the kind of pen he refers to here — the quill or reed, cut something in the form of a little chisel, its mechanical action rendering a broad line when it is drawn down or up in the direction of the broad face of the nib, and a thin line when it is drawn crossways on the thin edge. The design of all good types was, of course, based on this action of the pen in writing, and the very forms of the letters themselves, as well as the *living* quality of their design, have their origin in it. It seems hardly necessary to state this principle since, with the exception of our typefounders, almost everyone is familiar with it. But what Bodoni did was to consider his designs as being made with a broader and sharper-edged pen than anyone had thought of before, or than, I doubt, anyone would be able to make. If we have any fault to find with him, it is here, for in striving for neatness and sharpness and greater contrast he overstepped the mark a little and gave to his letters something more of the character of copperplate engraving than of penman-

ship. Another change which he introduced into the forms of his Roman letters was in the serifs. In the old-style types, and in the classical Roman forms generally, the serifs did not form a sharp angle with the upright strokes of the letters, but flowed into them on more or less of a curve. The serifs of the lowercase letters you will remember, in the earlier types, do not form a right angle with the upright strokes, but rather an acute one. Bodoni reduced the serifs of his capitals to single sharp lines of the same weight as the thin strokes of the letters, and the serifs of his lowercase are raised to a nearly, if not quite, horizontal position at right angles with the upright strokes. This plays an important part in that sharpness and brilliance which he tells us he sought, and tends to produce an effect of rigidity in keeping with the coldly classical ideal by which he was governed. While his own types were never really mechanical and lifeless, they often had sufficient appearance of being so to lend encouragement to a tendency which ended in the complete destruction of this vital principle of the pen and produced the worst and most

artificial types which have ever been known.
It is the well-merited repugnance for these
which has brought, unjustly, I think, disfavour
upon Bodoni. He should hardly be held re-
sponsible for the exaggerations and miscon-
ceptions of his aims. The Didots in France
carried the idea a step further, but they printed
with such perfect taste and style that one is
inclined to excuse them on these grounds. He
offers, farther on in his preface, his system
of measurement for the proportions of his
lowercase letters. ''Divide the body of the
type into seven parts,'' he says, ''and let two
at the top and two at the bottom be for the
ascenders and descenders and the three in the
middle for the other letters.'' Any such at-
tempt to regulate design by mathematical rule
is bad, of course, and Bodoni himself admits
that ''these proportions should receive no law
but from what pleases the vision.'' I am not
sure, however, that such a rule would not do
much for type design; it might at least put
an end to the practice of typefounders who
try to crowd their faces on bodies too small
for them, ruthlessly chopping off the de-

scenders of the letters wherever they interfere with this procedure.

Bodoni's Italic letters, while they have in some instances a good deal of distinction, are generally less successful than the Romans, and nearly always have the weakening effect of too much slant.

The equipment of type faces which are shown in the "Manuale" as representing the sum of his achievements is bewildering in the range of sizes and in the variety of foreign and exotic characters. Arthur Young, the celebrated English economist, gives an account in one of the journals of his "Travels" of a visit to Bodoni in 1789 in which he says that he had 30,000 matrices at that time. In her introduction to the "Manuale," the widow of Bodoni tells us that he believed a thoroughly equipped establishment should be furnished with such a gradation of characters that the eye in passing from one to the other might hardly be able to perceive the difference. The sizes of the Romans run from what he calls "Parmigianina," which would correspond about to our 3½ or 4 point, up to "Papale,"

which would certainly require a body of at least eighty points of our measurement, and it is very hard to distinguish any size from that immediately preceding or following it. Not only were there all these sizes, but there were two kinds of faces of every size; one fully rounded and of strongly contrasted lines and one a little condensed and of less bold character, the former being generally intended for prose and the latter for poetry where it was desired to avoid breaking the lines.

"I have devised up to the present," he says, "one hundred and forty-two Roman characters, each with Italics and capitals, and seventeen scripts of which thirteen have their respective *Finanziere*," which was the name given to a more elaborate and florid form of the same letter, "and seven English comprising two round characters, and further several Russian, Greek, German, Hebrew, and other exotics; also a quantity of capitals for titles in Latin, Greek, and Russian. All of these I have had cast in matrices struck from punches entirely perfected with great love by my own hand." He goes on to tell

us that a single font, complete with Roman and Italics, required some three hundred and eighty punches.

The question of his having cut all the punches with his own hand gave rise to some bitter disputes in the years when he was at the height of his fame, and certainly the number of them seems a little incredible. Fournier's "Treatise on Printing," published in 1758, says that it took at that time three or four hours to cut a punch, and that not more than three or four could be cut in a day. We know, however, that he had assistants to whom he taught punch-cutting and type-founding, the brothers Amoretti (who afterward established a foundry of their own), and two other men; and it was claimed by certain persons who wished to detract from his fame that he owed the beauty of his types to these workmen. We know, nevertheless, that the style and manner is his own invention, and the probabilities are that the assistants merely helped him in the manual labour of finishing the punches and matrices. I have examined a specimen book of types and bor-

ders issued in 1811 from the foundry of these brothers Amoretti at San Pancrazio, a small town near Parma, and while they are mechanically very well cut, there can be little question that they lack the grace of design of the Bodoni characters.

Besides all these types, Bodoni cut an astonishing number of borders and ornaments which, in the best work of his later years, he seldom used. "It is not," he says, "a wise way in which to lend pomp or dignity to a book except, perhaps, to those books less valued by men of letters, and which are printed for the pleasure of persons of an elegance less disdainful." Yet in some of the inscriptions and smaller work where he made use of the ornaments the effect is altogether charming. It is interesting to note how these ornaments developed from the rococo French manner into a dryer and more classical form, much as did the types themselves.

The striking characteristic of his composition is the luxurious and sometimes prodigal use which he made of space. His titles were generally narrow in measure and were ar-

rangements of short, centered lines in various sizes, and nearly always of capitals. His text pages present a striking contrast to those of the masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In place of the compactness in the solid matter without leading, and the large pages of small type which prevailed in the earlier books, Bodoni endeavoured to set off his brilliant characters on great fields of white paper, and not only to have space in the margins, but also between the lines, showing a decided predilection for setting large types in narrow measures. This love of space produced a striking elegance of effect — not the elegance of the earlier printers certainly, but in its own way very splendid. When space got in between the lowercase letters themselves it did more harm than good, and some of the small sizes of the Roman types are so widely fitted on their bodies that the pages printed with them have a distressing appearance of having been sprayed with type. In the arrangement of the capitals in titles and headings, and in the innumerable inscriptions which were issued from the press, he showed
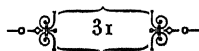
a remarkable nicety of taste and fine sense of balance. And the exercise of this faculty was no mere matter of blind instinct or special gift, but required on Bodoni's part the same study that it requires of us today in the lamentably few instances where we find it employed. There is an amusing anecdote which bears out this fact in one of Stendahl's journals of his Italian travels which I think is worth giving entire: "To do my duty as a traveler," he says, "I presented myself at Monsieur Bodoni's, the celebrated printer. I was agreeably surprised. This Piedmontais is not at all ostentatious, but in love with his art. After having shown me all his French authors he demanded of me which I preferred, the "Télémaque" of Fénélon, the Racine, or the Boileau. I vowed they all seemed equally beautiful. 'Ah, Monsieur!' cried Bodoni, 'you don't see the title of the Boileau?' I looked at it for a long time and was forced to admit that I could not see anything more perfect in that title than in the others. 'Ah, Monsieur!' cried Bodoni again, '*Boileau Despreux* in one single line of capitals!

I spent six months before I could decide upon exactly that type.' "

But if we have any ground for complaint against the mannerisms of his types or can find his composition questionable at any point, there is little to be said but praise for his presswork at its best. Good presswork, it must be remembered, was not easy in those days as the presses were comparatively crude affairs and the inking had to be done with the old hand balls of leather stuffed with wool (rollers not coming into use until about 1820), but the sharpness and brilliance of Bodoni's best work have never been surpassed.

Its success in a great measure was due to his selection of papers for the different sizes of type. He preferred vellum to anything else, and of his more important editions a few copies were always made on it, generally for presentation to distinguished patrons. When it came to paper, he preferred what was then called vellum paper, and which was made on a woven wire screen invented in England. The paper thus obtained resembled vellum a good deal more than did

the papers made on the laid screens which were commonly in use at that time. He had a way, too, of rolling his sheets after they were printed to smooth out the excess of impression left by the forms, though he himself expressly warns against the abuse of this process, which may easily be made to destroy entirely the impression which is the life and soul of all really fine typographic printing. Another trick was to paint in with the brush the spots on the large letters which did not come off from the impression entirely black. He must have given considerable attention to the making of good black ink, because previous to his time it had grown very bad, and he set a new standard for his contemporaries to follow in this.

In the form and size of his books he showed a decided liking for grandeur and pomp. In his preface he discourses somewhat ingenuously on this subject, and advances the curious theory that large books are better for the eyes of far-sighted people and little ones for the near-sighted. He must have thought Napoleon very far-sighted indeed, for he printed a three-

volume edition of Homer's Iliad, especially dedicated to him, in a folio so large that only half a page could be printed at one time on his largest press. He presented the Emperor with a copy on selected Bavarian vellum which must certainly have been very fine.

De Lama's catalogue, which forms the second volume of "The Life," cites and describes about three hundred and forty-five books printed by him at Parma, not counting second editions of his works, and one hundred and fifty-five inscriptions, pamphlets, and other matter of less than eight pages. But in the other catalogues of some of the collections of his works appear numerous items which are not cited by De Lama. The matter is further complicated by the existence of other volumes bearing plainly enough the imprint of the Royal Press at Parma, but not cited in any of the catalogues I have seen. They are so badly printed and in such a different manner from Bodoni's that it is difficult to believe they are genuine. In 1775 he brought out the first of his editions on a grand scale, and one of the most sumptuous of any of the

books he ever printed — an Epithalamium in
several exotic languages. But its splendour
rests largely upon the number of beautiful
copperplate ornaments which it contains. In
1780 appeared the works of Raphael Mengs
who had died the year before, and who was,
as we have seen, one of the leading spirits in
the artistic thought of the time and a great
hero of Bodoni's. In 1782 Bodoni published
another series of specimens — this time of
Russian characters, on forty-four pages. It
contained inscriptions in Latin and Russian
of congratulations to be presented to the
Russian prince and princess on their passage
through Parma. De Lama says: ''He offered
them respectfully and was delighted to see
the pleasure shown in their faces on seeing
the characters of their native language so fa-
mously cut and printed in a strange country.''
In 1783 a Roman Breviary was published
which is printed throughout in red and black
in four little 12mo volumes. This is chiefly
interesting because of the number of copies
which were made and sold — two thousand
of them, undoubtedly a considerable tax on

the pressroom of an establishment accustomed
to printing from five to five hundred copies.
In 1784 came another book which is remark-
able for its engraved decorations, ''The Prose
and Verse in Honour of Livia Doria Caraffa,''
in which the typography and presswork are
up to the mark of his finest productions. A
still more sumptuous reprint of this was made
in 1793. In 1785 he published his letter to
the Marquis de Cubières in French and Italian,
written in defence of his types that had been
criticised in France. He attacks his critics
with ill-disguised annoyance, particularly over
the criticism of his Greek types, which he here
says were exact copies of those of Etienne,
the famous French scholar printer of the six-
teenth century. When he comes to the doubts
which had been expressed in some quarters
of his having made all the foreign types him-
self, he quite loses his temper and offers to
deposit all the punches and matrices of the
types in question in any safe place, supposing
that the doubting Thomases had no occasion
to come to Parma and verify the fact on the
spot. It was this publication which brought

him the following letter from America, which, I think, is worth reading:

Sir: I have had the very great pleasure of receiving your excellent "Essai des Charactères de L'Imprimerie." It is one of the most beautiful that art has hitherto produced. I should be glad to see a specimen of your other fonts besides this Italic and Roman of the letter to the Marquis de Cubières, and to be informed of the price of each kind. I do not presume to criticise your Italic capitals — they are generally perfect. I would only beg leave to say that to me the form of the "t" in the word *lettre* of the title-page seems preferable to that of the "t" in the word *typographie* in the next page. As the downward stroke of T, P, R, F, B, D, H, K, L, I, and some others, which in writing we begin at the top, naturally swells as the pen descends, and it is only in the "A" and the "M" and "N" that those strokes are fine because the pen begins them at the bottom. With great esteem, I have the honour to be, etc.

B. FRANKLIN.

De Lama naively says that Bodoni was filled with joy at receiving this honourable letter from the "President of the United States of America"!

In 1788 appeared the first "Manuale," so called, in 360 pages, which contained a range of one hundred Roman characters, each size printed on one side of the paper and forming a description of a city. The names of the cities, which are appended to each face of type in the final "Manuale" of 1818, are intended to identify it with this earlier work.

Up to this time the books issued were practically all undertaken either at the instigation of the Duke or on Bodoni's own initiative; that is to say, the press did not execute outside orders. But his friend and patron, Cavaliere d'Azare, who was then Spanish minister to Rome, had obtained permission to establish a press at the Embassy, and he wanted Bodoni to come and take charge of it and print some splendid editions of the classics. Duke Ferdinand would not listen for a moment to parting with his printer, but suggested that the proposed classics could be done just as well at Parma. Bodoni began at once on this basis, and every week sent his proofs to Rome to be gone over by eminent scholars. In order to facilitate the execution of these orders from Rome he set up presses of his own in the Ducal Palace, and in 1791 brought out the first fruits of this arrangement in a large folio edition of Horace. This year begins a new period in the affairs of the Parma Press and marks the transition from his tentative and experimental stage to the fully developed and severer taste on which

his fame rests. He continued to receive orders from patrons in all parts of Europe, and even from England, where Edwards, the London bookseller, commissioned him to print an edition of Horace Walpole's "Castle of Otranto."

In this year also, at the age of fifty-one, he married a Parmesan lady to whom he had long been devoted and who proved to be a very happy choice. She showed not only great devotion throughout the remainder of his life, but a good deal of ability as well; for it was she who finished the printing and publication of his "Manuale" and carried out the editions of the French classics which he had planned and started before his death.

Bodoni had for some time held the title of Printer to the King of Spain, though I do not find that he ever printed anything for him; but notwithstanding, in 1793 his Catholic Majesty granted him a pension of 6,000 reals a year with no obligations whatsoever. With this impetus the year 1793 became a very productive one, and among the editions which we can find time to note here was the Gray's

"Elegy" translated into Italian, and later
Gray's "Complete Poems" in English, and
the edition of Virgil in two volumes. This
latter work brought down the stinging criti-
cism of the French printer and publisher,
Firman Didot, on the score of its inaccuracy,
and it must have been no pleasant sensation
for poor old Bodoni to read Didot's letter to
a friend in which he picks out the errors in
this and some of his Greek classics and says:
"It is time, citizen, that men of letters united
against negligent printers who think to have
done all when they have employed fine char-
acters and fine paper, and who regard the
correction of text as a mere bagatelle." But
he continues: "As a scholar I condemn him,
as a printer I admire him." Bodoni tried to
explain these errors by saying that some im-
perfect copies had been stolen from his press
and sold and thus got into France. We are
forced to admit, however, that there must
have been some foundation for this charge of
inaccuracy since it was frequently repeated.
Horace Walpole wrote in the postscript of one
of his letters dated from Strawberry Hill,

December 20, 1790: "Very late at night. I am glad you did not get a Parmesan Otranto — a copy is come so full of faults that it is not fit to be sold here." But this was written in 1790 and the Otranto was not published until 1791, so it might be fair to assume that what the elegant and gouty Lord Orford saw was an advance copy which may have been corrected afterward.

Time will not permit us to consider any more of his editions, except, perhaps, to mention a Lord's Prayer in no fewer than one hundred and fifty-five languages done in 1806, the title-page of which is in many respects the finest flower of the Bodoni style and seems to have been admired by himself since he copied its general characteristics for the title of his own "Manuale." The celebrated "Homer" already mentioned came out in 1808, and in his last year the "Racine" in three volumes — the first of a series of French classics which he had long had under way.

In his later years Bodoni was very deaf and suffered a good deal from other physical infirmities, as well as from the assaults of critics

and persons jealous of his fame. But to offset these he was more overwhelmed with praise and honours than any printer, I believe, ever was before or since. There was hardly a person of distinction in Europe at that time who had not visited his press. In 1802 the city of Parma had a medal struck in his honour, and there is a book issued from his press describing this occasion. He was invited to send proofs of his work to the Paris Exposition of 1806, the jury of which awarded him the gold medal over his French competitors. In 1810, Parma then being a part of the French Empire, Napoleon offered him a pension of 3,000 francs, and in 1810 also he was given the decoration of the Order of the Two Sicilies by the King of Naples in acknowledgment of a complete collection of his works which he had sent to that monarch. There were other like honours showered upon him in the bombastic manner of the period — so many that it would be tiresome to name them all. I will mention only one more which was less formal, but which must have meant much to the old man, who, when he was confined to his bed a year before

his death, was visited by the Comte St. Vallier. With characteristic grace and simplicity the Frenchman approached his bedside and said: "M. Bodoni, I come to render homage to the genius of typography. You are very well known in France. The Emperor esteems and likes you, and it is he who has ordered me to make this visit. Another day I will make my own." Bodoni showed such appreciation of this and expressed himself in such a lively manner that the Count further remarked: "M. Bodoni, if you have so much fire being sick, what will you be when you are well again?"

Bodoni never really got well again, but struggled to his feet only long enough to do some work on the "Manuale," without hope, however, of being able to publish it himself. He died toward the end of November, 1813.

Of Bodoni's personality, as I said at the outset, one does not gather an entirely satisfactory image from the biography by De Lama. Nevertheless, it is possible to dislodge from that monumental pile of human and superhuman virtues enough minor circumstances

with which, aided by the accounts of some of his distinguished visitors and critics and the few excellent portraits which exist, to construct a figure of attractive proportions. The overflowing vigour, of which his labours themselves are sufficient evidence, was tempered by North-Italian firmness of character. Of a lively temper and a sprightly good humour as well, he nevertheless had the perseverance and the steadfastness of purpose that generally are associated with characters of more sober mien. He appears to have been generous, and vain in the highest degree, but with the simple, unconscious, and whole-hearted vanity of the Latin temperament. He bathed freely and joyously in the honours which were showered upon him, and no doubt toadied not a little to the favour of the great persons from whom these distinctions flowed, but one should bear in mind that it would have been next to impossible, at that time, to have developed and maintained such an enterprise on any other terms.

In 1818 his widow published the final edition of the "Manuale" which contains

specimens of all of his types and ornaments, but as you will have an opportunity to see this and examine it for yourselves I shall not tax you with a further description of it.

In 1872 a statue of Bodoni was erected at Saluzzo, and on this occasion an exhibition was held by the United Typographical Societies of Italy to which American printers were invited to contribute. This year the anniversary of his death is to be celebrated by the different printing organizations of Italy.

We have seen with what esteem he was held in his own day, how much he was admired, and how greatly his works were prized, and the influence he had upon the other printers of the period, some of whom, the Didots, Firman, and Pierre, I am inclined to think, surpassed him in many respects in his own manner.

It only remains to consider the position he occupies in the History of the Art of Typography from the viewpoint of our own day. In a paper read at the Sorbonne in 1900, Piero Barbéra said of him that though he had a great idea of the perfection of printing from

the artistic point of view, and had high esteem
for the dignity of the art, he lacked perhaps
that of the influence it must have upon society
—he had not the clear vision of its ultimate
evolution. He was a kind of court officer,
like a "first gentleman of the bedchamber,"
or any other. His was, in short, a wholly
aristocratic art. Mr. Alfred Pollard, in his
work entitled "Fine Books," which is one
of the more important recent publications
upon the history of printing, dismisses Bodoni
with scant courtesy as a mere follower of
Baskerville and a printer of books very good
in their way, but in quite a wrong way. But
Mr. Pollard's work, scholarly and replete as
it is with an intimate knowledge of his subject,
is written in what might be called the British
perspective method of criticism. That is to
say, the critic stands in the middle of England
and views his subjects in diminishing per-
spective in all directions, his estimation de-
creasing as the geographical location of the
object viewed recedes from the British Isles.
Baskerville is in the immediate foreground,—
he is on the Island,—life size, and Bodoni over

in Parma, off on the horizon, is scarcely visible to the naked English eye.

And then by the critic so disposed, it may very well be argued that Bodoni represents an epoch of affectations and a school founded upon false conceptions. But if we grant all this, may we not be tempted as well to inquire with the same rigour into the quality and value of the inspiration by which recent English, and to a great extent American, ''revivals'' of the art of printing have been set on foot? To the powerful personality and uncompromising craftsmanship of William Morris we certainly owe much of the interest of our own particular day in printing as a fine art, and his teachings, more than any others, have dominated most of the attempts at fine bookmaking in England for some years past. His masterful revivals of fifteenth-century printing are certainly beautiful objects of art in themselves, and if they possess any fault, it is only that they are nearly, if not quite, impossible to read. They were printed in characters modeled after those of an age in which he did not live — they attempted, through an inspiration largely

founded upon sentiment, to bring back a manner irrevocably gone by. Was this an affectation better or worse, or only as bad as that under which Bodoni laboured?

The interest which Morris aroused has certainly done much good, but one cannot help feeling that the style he created has rather hindered than helped the present-day printer in the advancement of his art. It has given rise to a curious notion that any art in printing has inevitably something to do with the style of the fifteenth century and is hence not appropriate for the demands of every-day work, but should be exercised only on expensive and rare occasions. In consequence, we find printing generally conceived as of two distinct kinds — "commercial" and "artistic." In reality the two kinds of printing which exist and always have existed are *good printing* and *bad printing*, and any piece of work, no matter what its purpose, if it be well and appropriately done, is *artistic*, if it be paid for, is *commercial*.

Bodoni, whose name is anathema to the more ardent followers of the Morris school,

made improvements and infused new life into what was current in his day. What mannerisms he had were of his own time and did not interfere with the utility of his work — he made printing *more* readable and not less so.